United Nations ST/IC/2000/15

Secretariat

22 March 2000

Information circular*

To: Members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: **Recommendations of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee at its twenty-second and twenty-third sessions**

I. Purpose of the circular

1. It was agreed that the recommendations of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee (SMCC) at its twenty-third session (SMCC-XXIII), as approved by the Secretary-General (and, retroactively, the recommendations of SMCC at its twenty-second session (SMCC-XXII)) would be made available to staff in an information circular. On 23 December 1999, the Secretary-General approved the agreements achieved at SMCC-XXIII.

2. The following excerpts from the reports of SMCC-XXII and XXIII contain the substantive recommendations agreed upon at those sessions of the staff-management consultative mechanism.[1]

II. Recommendations of SMCC-XXII

3. SMCC-XXII agreed to focus on reform of human resources management. The issues included the delegation of authority and mechanisms of accountability, recruitment and placement, special post allowances, conditions of service, staff development, the appeals process, and internal justice.

A. Human resources management

4. SMCC-XXII took up the issues on the basis of the background note of the Working Group on Staff Administration of the Task Force on Human Resources Management and a discussion paper.

Delegation of authority and mechanisms of accountability

5. It recommended that the entire record of its discussion (paras. 15-40) should be forwarded to the Working Group on Staff Administration for its particular attention and that the relevant parts of its report could be included in the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly further to resolution 51/226. Matters which had a direct impact on delegation of authority should be given priority consideration in the future work of SMCC.

6. SMCC also recommended that, within the context of accountability, managers be instructed to take the necessary measures, including initiating an investigation when appropriate, in case(s) of reported misbehaviour by a staff member they supervise, whether such action by the staff member concerned took place in the performance of his/her duties or outside the workplace in cases which brought the Organization into disrepute. A review of the cases of the Joint Appeals Board (JAB) or United Nations Administrative Tribunal of the past three years was recommended to be undertaken in terms of the responsibility and accountability of the manager(s) concerned with a view to taking appropriate corrective action.

* Expiration date of the present circular: 30/6/2001.

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Recruitment and placement

7. SMCC-XXII conducted its review of this subject on the basis of a background note of the Working Group on Recruitment and Placement which outlined a new recruitment and placement system. With regard to the process of recruitment, placement and promotion, SMCC recommended:

(a) That central rostering (or non-rostering) of unsolicited curricula vitae should be reviewed in order to build up a meaningful and useful global tool for identifying qualified candidates or to decentralize to the appropriate departments and offices the review of such applications;

(b) That organizational needs and planning processes be established and implemented to facilitate the conduct of national examinations, G-to-P examinations and circulation of vacancies;

(c) That guidelines be issued for prompt advertisement of vacant posts, sufficiently in advance to allow for succession planning. If the post was encumbered, that should be indicated in the vacancy announcement;

(d) That measures to ensure the accountability of managers should be a precondition for decentralization of recruitment and placement. Monitoring should be improved by developing performance indicators against which to assess managers in their respective departments and/or duty stations;

(e) That at the beginning of the process, priorities should be established to ensure that placement and promotion criteria are strictly observed;

(f) That the application of rules, disbursement of resources and granting of contracts should be properly monitored;

(g) That generic job descriptions should be developed, to the extent possible;

(h) That the system of joint bodies should be reviewed to assess the advisability of having only one joint body;

(i) That needs of General Service staff regarding placement and promotion should be given due consideration;

(j) That individual staff members should be informed officially and promptly of any changes in their post incumbency;

(k) That provisions of paragraph 10 of administrative instruction ST/AI/413 on placement and promotion, concerning the provision of staffing table information to joint review bodies, should be fully implemented at all duty stations;

(l) That the President/Chairperson of the Staff Union/Association at each duty station should be given access to the staffing table of that duty station in the office of the Head of Administration at the duty station and, in New York, in the office of the Head of each department or office.

8. SMCC-XXII also recommended that, in order to streamline the drafting of vacancy announcements, the initial draft would be prepared by departments in accordance with guidelines prepared by the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). Such guidelines would be shared with staff representatives. The draft vacancy announcement would be forwarded to OHRM for approval and release.

9. In addition, pilot projects for short-term recruitment for the General Assembly and other meetings could be delegated to the department concerned. Such delegations had to be subject to the development by OHRM of appropriate guidelines in consultation with staff and managers at the departmental level. Those projects would be monitored by OHRM to ensure observance of the guidelines and of the relevant rules and regulations. Experience with such projects should be reviewed at SMCC-XXIII.

10. SMCC recommended establishing a set of guidelines for situations in which encumbered posts did not need to be advertised.

11. With regard to the reconfirmation of posts prior to the issuance of the vacancy announcement, the Committee agreed with the recommendation contained in the working paper to delete the requirement for reconfirming the classification level of the post when no change in functions was envisaged.

12. Concerning the review by the appointment and promotion bodies, in cases where for unforeseen circumstances in the appraisal of a staff member a gap was found to exist, the appointment and promotion body concerned would grant the staff member in question the benefit of the doubt and consider his/her

performance as fully satisfactory. Once OHRM had received an application for a post and if the file of the staff member was incomplete, OHRM would inform the Executive Officer of the staff member in order to ensure that the supervisor completed the PAS evaluation.

13. To address the concern that appointment and promotion bodies had in the past not fully considered all applications for posts, it was agreed to recommend that OHRM or the respective personnel office at offices away from Headquarters be requested to send out a communication to all applicants within 10 working days after the deadline, acknowledging receipt of their applications.

14. The one-page restriction on the length of an application for a post, as contained in administrative instruction ST/AI/413, was recommended to be increased to no more than three pages.

15. SMCC recommended that the entirety of its report dealing with recruitment and placement, as well as document SMCC-XXII/1998/15, should be forwarded to the Working Group on Recruitment and Placement for further consideration. That Working Group should consider the paper in conjunction with paragraph 17 of administrative instruction ST/AI/413.

Special post allowances

16. In view of the divergence of approaches to the exercise of authority for the granting of special post allowances (SPAs), SMCC recommended that the proposal to delegate such authority to programme managers be sent to the Working Groups of the Task Force on Human Resources Management for further consideration in the overall context of the delegation of authority. This part of the SMCC report, as well as document SMCC-XXII/1998/18, should be forwarded to the Working Group on Staff Administration of the Task Force on Human Resources Management for its further consideration.

17. With regard to the issue of temporary promotions, SMCC recommended that its report, as well as document SMCC-XXII/1998/19, should also be referred to the Working Group on Staff Administration for further consideration.

Conditions of service

18. Concerning conditions of service, SMCC-XXII took up a number of issues which were under discussion in the context of reform, including performance awards, alternative work schedules, and salary and pension questions.

19. It was agreed that duty stations should be encouraged to establish pilot projects in the area of recognition of performance and that the experience of existing pilot projects in various parts of the Secretariat should be shared with other duty stations. With respect to underperformance, SMCC agreed that further consideration should be given to remedial measures such as training, coaching, mentoring and developmental assignments, and to devising appropriate responses in cases of continued underperformance.

20. SMCC endorsed two options for alternative work schedules, on the understanding that the number of hours of work would be adjusted in accordance with local practice at each duty station.

21. On salaries and pension issues, SMCC agreed that the revised methodology for determining salaries of locally recruited staff, which came into effect on 1 January 1998, should be kept under close review to ensure that its implementation upheld the Flemming principle. In particular, the importance of staff as well as management participation in training in connection with the salary survey process was emphasized as a means of ensuring full participation of all parties.

Staff development

22. SMCC agreed that the Organization's staff development and training policy had to support the Secretary-General's reform programme by building the substantive and managerial competence of staff and contributing to organizational culture change. The goal of staff development was to meet organizational needs and to assist staff members in fulfilling individual career aspirations. Staff development and training was one of the most important priorities for the Organization, and SMCC stressed that funding for training had to be increased as a critical investment in the Organization's future.

Participation in ongoing work in human resources management reform

23. It was agreed that, in the future, concept papers developed by the Working Groups of the Task Force on Human Resources Management would be shared with staff unions/associations at all duty stations and that the pilot projects could be assigned to any duty station that expressed a willingness to participate, including small duty stations. Staff at all duty stations should be involved in contributing to projects. It was also agreed to undertake a review of the implementation of human resources policies in duty stations away from Headquarters, particularly as pertained to the conditions of service of local General Service staff.

Delegation of authority/accountability in the appeals process

24. For its discussion on this item, SMCC-XXII had before it a discussion paper developed by the Working Group on Staff Administration which set out options for improving the way in which disputes were resolved as early as possible. In this context, SMCC agreed that the Administrative Law Unit (ALU) of OHRM would continue to receive requests for administrative review. ALU would first determine the type of administrative decision for which the review was requested. If the decision was of a discretionary or managerial nature, the case would be referred to the decision maker for review and preparation of any response to the JAB. If the decision involved application or interpretation of a rule, under Staff Rule 111.2, ALU would advise on those aspects.

25. SMCC agreed that the new procedure should be put into effect on a pilot basis for six months, to be closely monitored by ALU and OHRM, and that the results would be shared with the staff.

Internal justice issues

26. The Committee agreed that the review and revitalization of the justice system was an integral part of the reform of the Organization. In order to achieve that goal, it recommended establishing a joint Staff-Management Working Group on the Internal Justice System and agreed on elements to be included in a prioritized list of terms of reference.

27. Bearing in mind the importance of counsel in cases of appeal, SMCC recommended that establishing and/or revitalizing Panels of Counsel at Headquarters and offices away from Headquarters be explored as a priority by each local staff-management machinery, which should ensure that all applicable rules were applied.

B. Follow-up to previous sessions of SMCC

28. SMCC-XXII considered a number of issues of a global nature in its follow-up to previous sessions.

29. With regard to the Code of Conduct for United Nations Staff, it was recommended that an amendment to the proposal, contained in document A/52/488, be presented to the General Assembly, removing all reference to staff representatives from the current text. Such matters should be the subject of staff-management consultations which should be initiated promptly, in the context of article VIII of the Staff Regulations. Further, the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) (Headquarters) Working Group to review administrative instruction ST/AI/371 on revised disciplinary measures and procedures should be convened immediately following SMCC-XXII.

30. Concerning facilities provided to staff representatives, SMCC agreed to recommend the establishment of a new joint advisory committee for field issues. The new JAC (Field Issues) would comprise representatives of DPKO/FALD, OHRM, the Field Service Staff Union and the United Nations Staff Union.

31. It was agreed that OHRM should provide timely guidance to duty stations for the local staff/management machinery to examine the issues involved in the implementation of flexi-time measures at the local level.

32. SMCC agreed that the Joint Advisory Committees and other local staff/management machinery at each duty station could review the issue of outsourcing and report to SMCC-XXIII. A circular would be issued to inform staff of the agreement reached at SMCC-XXI on the subject.

33. Turning to gender issues, the Committee agreed that, upon receipt of the draft revision of administrative instruction ST/AI/412 on special measures for the advancement of gender equality, staff representatives at all duty stations would be provided ample opportunity to submit their proposals and questions to OHRM within a time-frame longer than the usual three weeks. The role and terms of reference of departmental focal

points for women should be defined in an administrative issuance.

34. It was also agreed that administrative instruction ST/AI/415 on redeployment of staff would be abolished and would not be used in any future redeployment exercise.

C. Field service issues

35. SMCC-XXII also took up a number of issues affecting conditions of service at duty stations away from Headquarters, including field service issues, and agreed on the following actions:

(a) OHRM would immediately authorize the full time release of the President of FSSU;

(b) The policies and procedures governing payment of mission subsistence allowance for leave accrued during — but taken after completion of — temporary duty (TDY) would remain unchanged;

(c) The experience gained with the occasional recuperation break (ORB) policy over the one-year pilot project indicated a need to revise the policy. The agreement on ORB for staff serving in field missions was endorsed as part of the overall effort to rationalize and streamline such policies for application in field missions. The recommended revisions to the ORB policy should be introduced simultaneously with the conclusion of the review of compensatory time off (CTO) and other leave arrangements for field missions;

(d) The specific matter raised by the auditors regarding compensation for hours worked in travel status would, in line with the advice provided by OHRM, relate solely to hours in active service;

(e) Staff-management consultations on the CTO issues raised should be concluded as a matter of priority in the coming months;

(f) The JAC (Field Issues) would review a paper to be submitted by the FSSU for the introduction of flexi-time in field missions;

(g) On the conversion of Field Service (FS) staff to the Professional category, it would be consistent with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 52/219 and Staff Regulation 4.4 that staff at the FS-6 and FS-7 level who had been converted to the P-3 or P-4 level in accordance with administrative instruction ST/AI/360/Rev.1 on movement of staff from the Field Service category to the Professional category could apply for internal vacancies within the Secretariat at the P-4 level and above. In considering their candidature, full consideration would be given to the staff member's qualifications against the requirements of the post, and organizational requirements regarding measures to achieve gender equality and equitable geographical distribution would be taken into account;

(h) The considerations contained in document SMCC-XXII/1998/27/Add.1 on the issue of occasional recuperation breaks for staff serving on field mission assignments were adopted;

(i) Concerning contamination in the UNIKOM area, SMCC recommended that:

(i) The report of the consultants would be translated into English and released as soon as possible, and a copy of the report in the original language would be provided immediately to FSSU;

(ii) Management would support staff efforts to obtain the report of the United States Government and, if possible, of the Government of Iraq on the issue;

(iii) The Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Field Administration and Logistics Division (DPKO/FALD) would provide to FSSU the list of affected UNIKOM staff members;

(iv) An independent medical consultant would be retained for guidance on the issue;

(v) Management would undertake to examine the financial implications and identify sources of funding for the mandatory medical testing, including use of insurance coverage and reserves. Upon return from mission assignment in the area, a medical examination will be provided, upon request, to the staff members concerned.

III. Recommendations of SMCC-XXIII

36. SMCC-XXIII agreed to focus on the issues of reform and change of human resources management and on the implementation of agreements achieved at prior sessions of the Committee.

A. Human resources management reform

37. SMCC took up various aspects of human resources management reform under this rubric — notably, career development; recruitment, placement and promotion; and delegation of authority and accountability.

Career development

38. SMCC welcomed the model of organizational core values and core managerial competencies and considered it to be central to all human resources strategies. It recommended that priority be given to developing applications of this model, in consultation with staff.

39. Funding for training and career support programmes should be increased and increased guidance and support provided, particularly to offices away from Headquarters, to assist staff in identifying staff development and career support opportunities.

40. SMCC recommended that a communication be sent to all programme managers emphasizing the importance of organizational learning and requesting that managers actively contribute to their staff's development and encourage the learning efforts of their staff.

41. The issue of contractual arrangements should be discussed in greater depth at SMCC-XXIV in 2000, in view of the implications for career development of the variety of such arrangements between staff members and the Organization.

42. With regard to the issue of mobility of staff across functions, occupations, departments and duty stations, SMCC agreed that this important and complex issue required further consideration and that a full discussion should be held at SMCC-XXIV.

Recruitment, placement and promotion

43. SMCC conducted an initial exchange of views on a proposal put forward by management to improve recruitment, placement and promotion processes in the United Nations Secretariat. Constraints of time precluded an in-depth discussion of all aspects of the proposed system. The Committee felt that a number of initiatives should go forward to improve the capacity of the Organization in its recruitment, placement and promotion system. However, the Committee had no alternative but to recommend that, in order to ensure the broadest possible inputs into the design of new procedures, staff representatives would consult their constituents on the proposal which had been put forward. A special session of SMCC should be convened at the earliest opportunity to examine the proposed system of recruitment, placement and promotion and to agree on recommendations which could go forward to the Secretary-General (the sixth special session of SMCC was convened from 4 to 6 October 1999).

Accelerated increments

44. The Committee took note of a discussion paper submitted by the staff (SMCC-XXIII/1999/5) and agreed to revert to this subject at SMCC-XXIV.

Accountability

45. SMCC resumed its discussion of the issue of accountability on the basis of a document submitted by management on the next steps in the reform process for human resources management (SMCC-XXIII/1999/2), and, in particular, annex C of that document.

46. The Committee felt that management proposals on accountability, by and large, could form a suitable framework for a future system. An in-depth analysis and discussions should precede delegation of authority. The staff representatives recommended that the discussions be held in the context of a special session of SMCC, to be held at the earliest opportunity. The core values and managerial competencies which were essential in defining the role and activities of managers should be fully taken into account in the selection process and in the designation of managers. It was also recommended that the existing system of institutional accountability be maintained.

B. Follow-up to previous sessions of SMCC

47. It was agreed that the recommendations of SMCC-XXIII, as approved by the Secretary-General, and, retroactively, the recommendations of SMCC-XXII would be made available to staff in an information circular.

C. Implementation of SMCC agreements

48. Six issues were taken up under this item of the agenda.

Mobility and hardship allowance

49. The Secretary-General had approved the recommendations of the modalities for payment of the mobility and hardship allowance. SMCC endorsed the following implementation steps:

(a) Suspending the counting of the actual time to be applied to the mobility portion of the mobility and hardship allowance at the parent duty station while the staff member was on temporary duty (TDY) at a special mission away from his/her parent duty station;

(b) Counting service at each special mission exceeding one year as credit for the mobility element of the mobility and hardship scheme, which would become payable upon return to the parent duty station;

(c) The effective date would be 1 January 1996;

(d) An administrative instruction would be issued shortly, giving staff three months within which to claim recalculation from 1 January 1996 of their mobility and hardship allowance. Claims would be reviewed within that time-frame by FALD/DPKO and other departments, and action would then be taken to adjust the allowances of those staff members affected and a one-time payment made.

80 per cent advance against final pay

50. SMCC recommended that the following proposal be endorsed regarding the 80 per cent advance against final pay. At SMCC-XIX, it had been agreed that an 80 per cent advance against final pay would be granted to staff upon separation from service, as per staff rule 103.14 (iii). To implement this agreement, the following steps would be taken: (a) executive offices or departments would determine the annual leave balance of staff as of the date of separation; (b) 80 per cent of the accumulated annual leave balance would be granted as an advance; (c) in addition, the final month's salary would be paid in full; (d) to facilitate the process and to address the recurring problem of recovery of overpayments, the mobility and hardship allowance would henceforth be payable on a monthly basis.

51. SMCC welcomed the progressive resolution of the problem and urged all parties involved to ensure that final payments be processed in a far more timely manner.

Termination indemnity for staff on fixed-term contracts

52. SMCC recommended that management dedicate resources to undertake, with staff input, a review of contractual mechanisms, on an immediate basis, and to include, *inter alia*, the issue of termination indemnity for fixed-term (or equivalent) contract holders.

UNIKOM contamination

53. SMCC recommended that:

(a) The original report on possible contamination of staff from depleted uranium in UNIKOM, prepared by the consultants, should be made immediately available to the Assistant Secretary-General of OHRM (as focal point) in order to be translated from Danish into English;

(b) Every effort should be made also to obtain the report prepared by the United States Government on the same subject;

(c) Similarly, every effort should also be made to obtain the results of an analysis conducted by the Government of Iraq and made available to the United Nations;

(d) The services of an independent medical consultant/expert should be retained to analyse the data and advise on the proper action to be taken. In this connection, the United Nations Scientific Committee on Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) could be asked to recommend an expert on exposure and biological effects of radiation;

(e) FALD should make available to the focal point the list of all staff who served with UNIKOM who might have been exposed to uranium;

(f) A joint review (staff and management) would be conducted every four months to assess the developments and prepare a progress report;

(g) A similar analysis in regard to Kosovo should be undertaken in order to determine whether staff serving in the Kosovo mission area could also be at similar risk.

JAC (Field Issues)

54. It was recommended that the approved recommendation of SMCC-XXII on the establishment

of a new Joint Advisory Committee for Field Issues be implemented as soon as possible.

Accountability in the context of recruitment and placement

55. SMCC recommended that approved recommendations of SMCC-XXII on this subject be implemented (see para. 7 above).

Issues related to internal justice

56. SMCC recommended that, owing to its critical importance, the administration of justice be addressed as a priority issue in the human resources management reform and that the joint Working Group and its terms of reference, as approved at SMCC-XXII, be established with immediate effect. Furthermore, the Organization should establish and provide appropriate resources, as soon as possible, for a dedicated task team comprised of representatives of the staff and management whose terms of reference would be to review relevant documentation, identify all issues, and issue a summary outline. The work of the task team should be presented to the Working Group for its review prior to SMCC-XXIV.

D. Conditions of service

57. SMCC took up two main issues under this heading: workplace safety issues, and conditions of service at field locations.

Workplace safety issues

58. The Committee addressed this issue on the basis of a conference room paper presented by the staff (SMCC-XXIII/1999/CRP.4/Rev.2) which reviewed a range of conditions in the workplace which posed a risk and danger to the safety and health of staff. SMCC recommended endorsing the following:

General responsibilities of the Organization

59. The Organization undertakes:

(a) To comply with the safety and health measures to be taken regarding hazards or risks to safety and health from hazardous ambient factors at work, including appropriate standards, codes and guidelines;

(b) To provide and maintain workplaces, plant, equipment, tools and machinery and organize work so as to eliminate or control hazardous ambient factors at work;

(c) To set out in writing respective programmes and arrangements, as part of general policy and arrangements in the field of occupational safety and health, and the various responsibilities exercised under these arrangements. This information will be clearly communicated to staff;

(d) In consultation with staff and/or their representatives:

(i) To make an assessment of the hazard and risk to safety and health of staff arising from hazardous ambient factors at work, requesting and making effective use of the information provided by the supplier of equipment or chemicals and from other reasonably available sources;

(ii) To take all practicable measures to reduce exposure to hazardous ambient factors and, in any case, ensure that the exposure does not exceed exposure limits;

(e) To take the following curative, preventive and/or protective measures in identifying and addressing actual or potential hazardous factors or risks to the maximum extent possible:

(i) Eliminate the hazardous factors or risks;

(ii) Control the hazardous factors or risks at source;

(iii) Minimize the hazardous factors or risks by means that include the design of safe work systems;

(iv) Insofar as the hazardous factors or risks remain, provide for the use of personal protective equipment, including clothing, as appropriate, at no cost to the staff, and implement measures to ensure its use;

(f) To provide for:

(i) Regular surveillance of the working environment and, where necessary, occupational health surveillance;

(ii) Adequate and competent supervision of work and work practices;

(iii) The application and use of appropriate control measures and the periodic review of their effectiveness;

(iv) Appropriate and periodic education and training to staff and, where appropriate, to staff representatives on issues relating to hazardous ambient factors;

(g) To make arrangements to:

(i) Deal with accidents, occurrences and incidents which may involve hazards or risks to safety and health from hazardous ambient factors;

(ii) Eliminate or control any damage to the safety and health of staff, and thereby to the public and environment.

General responsibilities of staff

60. In accordance with instructions and the means provided by management, as well as basic common sense, the staff shall endeavour:

(a) To comply with prescribed safety and health measures;

(b) To take all reasonable steps to eliminate or control hazards or risks to themselves and to others from hazardous ambient factors at work, including proper care and use of protective clothing, facilities and equipment placed at their disposal for this purpose;

(c) To report forthwith to their immediate supervisor any situation which they believe could present a hazard or risk to their safety and health or that of other persons arising from hazardous ambient factors at work and which they cannot properly deal with themselves.

Periodic reviews

61. The Department of Management would provide to the President of SMCC periodic written updates on the developments and undertakings with regard to the above-mentioned arrangements, for dissemination to all staff, through SMCC.

Written report

62. A comprehensive written report on the implementation of these measures will be presented for review by SMCC-XXIV. The text of SMCC-XXIII/1999/CRP.4/Rev.2 is included in the report of SMCC-XXIII, in view of the importance attached to the subject.

Conditions of service at field locations

63. SMCC recommended that staff should be invited to participate in the ad hoc inter-agency working group dealing with entitlements at high risk, highly isolated and special field locations.

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64. The next session of SMCC, its twenty-fourth, will take place at the United Nations Office at Vienna from 27 April to 4 May 2000.

Notes

[1] Reference copies of the full reports can be obtained from the SMCC secretariat or the Staff Committee.